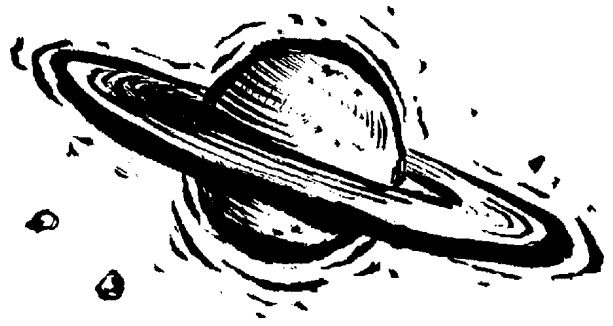


# Beyond Your Own Backyard



**Just past your window: a galaxy of volunteer opportunities**

Want an excellent way to break past the gravitational field of your easy chair, or to emerge from a black hole of relentless routines and meaningless obligations? Try getting involved with community service.

If you think you don't have the energy for volunteer work, think again. Once you plug yourself into a cause that really means the world to you, you may discover an unlimited - and previously untapped - wellspring of energy. And that energy can carry over into all else you do in life. What's more, volunteering can bring joy to the lives of many people, and back to you in return.

Consider these practical ways to get started:

1. Identify the causes or issues you feel most strongly about. (Have you experienced a difficult loss in your life? Helping others who've had a similar loss can speed the healing process.)
2. Match the volunteer opportunity to your skills - teaching, communications, manual labor, ability to work with people or computers - so you won't need extra training. Or, you can choose an opportunity that does require learning new skills and opens up your career options.
3. Mesh volunteering with your other goals. A physically active undertaking, like maintaining trails at a local nature preserve, can help you get more fit and lose weight.
4. Don't limit yourself to the obvious, such as volunteering at churches or hospitals, or helping at the local soup kitchen during holidays when volunteers often abound. (How about offering your help in the spring or summer instead?)
5. Be realistic about your available time. If you over-commit, you'll only tire yourself out, neglect your own job, frustrate family members, and shortchange those you're trying to help.
6. Don't let a physical disability, lack of transportation, or limited time hold you back. Ask about opportunities to help from home using your telephone or computer, for example.
7. Consider including your family in the volunteer experience. It's a great way to introduce children to the value of giving, and can bring the family closer together.
8. As soon as you feel inspired to volunteer, go ahead - pick up the phone. Remember, you're only asking about opportunities and you can always say no. But if you don't make the first move, you'll have lost a potential chance to make a lasting change in your own and others' lives.
9. Can't locate an existing volunteer opportunity for the cause that most inspires you? Try creating your own. Fix an extra meal serving for the man next door who just lost his wife. Get your neighbors to help you clean up the vacant lot up the block. Offer free babysitting 1 evening a week to a single mother or father. Remember, even small things can be meaningful.



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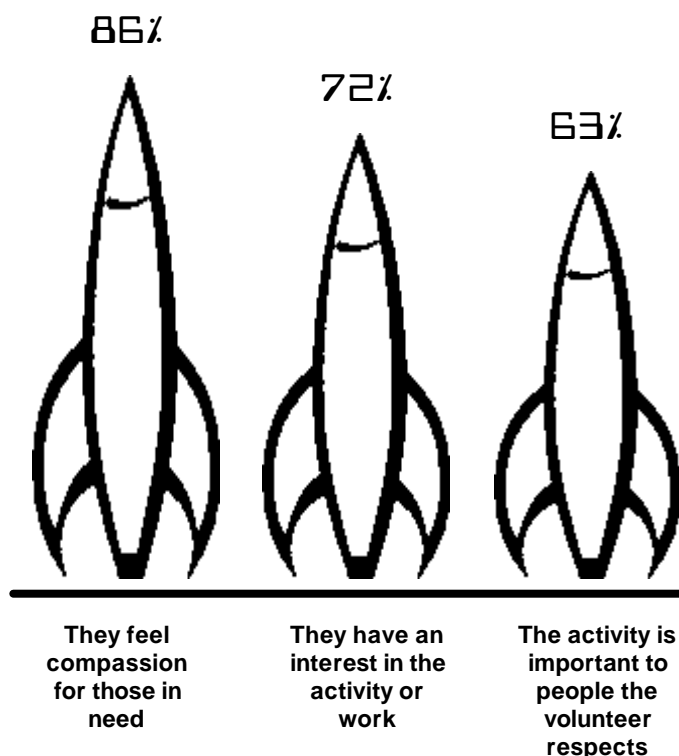


Just past your window: a galaxy of volunteer opportunities

Independent Sector in Washington DC suggest these volunteering alternatives:

- Daycare centers
- Public schools and colleges
- Halfway houses
- Community theaters
- Drug rehabilitation centers
- Fraternal organizations and civic clubs
- Retirement centers and homes for the elderly
- Meals on Wheels
- Museums, art galleries, and monuments
- Community choirs, bands, and orchestras
- Prisons
- Neighborhood parks
- Youth organizations, sports teams, and after-school programs
- Shelters for battered women and children
- Historical restorations, battlefields, and national parks.

## Why Volunteers Volunteer



Source: 1999 national survey by Independent Sector

## Finding Where the Need Is

**These Internet services can connect you at warp speed to volunteer openings in your community:**

**VolunteerMatch**, [www.volunteermatch.org](http://www.volunteermatch.org). The site's online database lets you search thousands of opportunities by zip code, category and date, and you can sign up automatically by e-mail. Consider walk-a-thons, beach day cleanups, tutoring, home building, meal deliveries, and more.

**Corporation for National Service**, [www.cns.gov](http://www.cns.gov). Click on "National Service in Your State" for a list of local opportunities.

**SERVEnet**, [www.serve.net](http://www.serve.net). Just enter your zip code to find volunteer opportunities in your community.

**Idealist**, [www.idealists.org](http://www.idealists.org). Click on "volunteer opportunities," then select your area of focus, where you'd like to volunteer (locally or globally), your skills and languages, and dates you're available. The system does the rest.

**Helping.org**, [www.helping.org](http://www.helping.org). Even a quick search can turn up opportunities for office manager, home-based volunteers, grooming and stable maintenance, court advocate for abused children, receptionist, food bank visitors, and more.